

Proto-Malayo-Polynesian: Some Phonetic Evidence for *l

Philippine languages are considered strong evidence for assertions about reconstructed Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP). We address the phonetic articulation of Proto-Austronesian *l in PMP. We show reflexes via reported articulatory data from nine Philippine languages including both the north and south Philippine languages (Olson et al. 2010). Audio recordings support our work in three languages (Olson et al. 2009, 2008), one of which has also undergone an ultrasound study (Mielke et al. 2011). We suggest that a novel articulation (an interdental approximant) was in common use as far back as PMP, minimally in allophonic distributions, but possibly as the default pronunciation. Considering this evidence should cause us to carefully reconsider how we reconstruct words within PMP and higher reconstructions. The alternative hypothesis is to find pathways for independent innovations around the periphery of an archipelago in nine different Philippine languages. The proposed historical articulation, an interdental approximant, is phonetically rare in the world's languages, but not unattested (Everett 1982; Harley 2012). It is therefore likely overlooked for its historical significance in reconstructing PMP. We suggest that the diverse reflexes (ɭ, l, d, Ø, ʔ, n, y, ɔ̃) for *l in Austronesian languages are based on the most salient acoustic cues for the specific speech communities. Zorc (1975: 264-6) acknowledges the irregular correspondences involving liquids but leaves the diversity unexplained. One possibility, which we advocate for, is that these variations are all strategies to bring the tongue inside the mouth due to social pressures while maintaining an auditory or perceptual cue. By appealing to visual motivations for sound change we link sound change process to language as a multi-modal experience (Vigliocco 2014; Ambrazaitis & House 2017; Perniss 2018). Finally following Havenhill and Do (2018), we agree that linking historical change phenomena in primarily oral-languages to how they are visually experienced leads scholars to a deeper understanding of community communication practices through time.

Correspondences for the interdental and PAn *l

English	Butbut	Lubuagen	Majukayong	Minangali	Kagayanen	Kalagan	Southern Catanduanes Bicolano	Blust (1999)
[eng]	[kyb]	[knb]	[knb]	[knb]	[knb]	[knb]	[knb]	[knb]
three	tu'ɔ̃u	ti'ɔ̃u	tu'ɔ̃u	tuɔ̃u	'tallo	toɔ̃o	tuɔ̃u	*telu
moon	'hʷuɔ̃an	'buɔ̃an	so'ɔ̃ag	soɔ̃ag	'buɔ̃an	boɔ̃an	buɔ̃an	*bulaN / *qiNas
path	'tʃaɔ̃an	'keɔ̃sa	'qaɔ̃sa	ʔaɔ̃sa	'daɔ̃an	daɔ̃an	daɔ̃a	*zalan

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